

MEETING REPORT: AYURVEDA GROUP DELIBERATIONS AT 22ND ANNUAL COCHRANE COLLOQUIUM 2014

The 22nd Annual Colloquium of the Cochrane Collaboration was held for the first time in India, at Hyderabad International Convention Center, Hyderabad from 20 to 29 September 2014. The Cochrane Collaboration is a global, not-for-profit network of independent researchers, which is dedicated to promoting evidence-informed health decision-making by producing high quality, relevant, accessible, systematic reviews and other synthesized research evidence. This year’s colloquium was unique in hosting the first-ever meetings of Ayurveda researchers and clinicians, with the aim of improving and expanding the evidence base for Ayurveda, under the aegis of the Cochrane Collaboration. There were three meetings, (a) Meeting 1: “Toward developing “CONSolidated Standards of Reporting Trials in Ayurveda (CONSORTIA)”, (b) Meeting 2: “The Cochrane Collaboration and Ayurveda Medicine: and (c) Meeting 3: Summarizing discussions of earlier meetings. All meetings were well represented by stakeholders from the Ayurveda fraternity and Cochrane groups.

MEETING 1: “THE COCHRANE COLLABORATION AND AYURVEDA MEDICINE: A PRE-EXPLORATORY MEETING”: 25TH SEPTEMBER 2014

The aim of this meeting was to explore the possibility of establishing a satellite for the Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) field of the Cochrane Collaboration. The South Asian Cochrane Centre has constantly facilitated and supported efforts in this direction. Dr. Prathap Tharyan opened the meeting as a forum for Ayurveda and Cochrane communities to interact and identify areas of mutual interest. As a logical progression, becoming part of the Cochrane Collaboration would provide Ayurveda practitioners a valuable opportunity to learn about best practices and evidence-based medicine. Ayurveda can also contribute to Cochrane, particularly the CAM field, via its structured logical framework and approach to understanding health and disease.

Dr. Eric Manheimer mooted the idea of a pre-exploratory meeting to bring together researchers interested in preparing

Cochrane reviews on Ayurveda (and conducting related methodological research). He presented an overview of the activities of the CAM field of the Cochrane Collaboration. It was also proposed to review previous Cochrane work applicable to Ayurveda (e.g., development of a CONSolidated Standards of Reporting Trials [CONSORT] statement for Ayurveda; summary of Ayurveda medicine reviews currently in The Cochrane Library; identification of Ayurveda RCTs for the South Asian Database of Controlled Clinical Trials) and discuss possible next steps for future Cochrane work evaluating and reviewing Ayurveda medicine interventions.

During the meeting, it was discussed that clinical research in Ayurveda is in its infancy and also has many methodological challenges. Owing to the paucity of publications that conform to standard Cochrane reviews, the results may be very few. The Ayurveda fraternity also strongly felt a need for capacity building among AYUSH researchers with the aim of enhancing the quality of research work and scientific publications in Ayurveda. The functions of the Ayurveda satellite may hence be training and capacity building. A nodal center may be designated, which co-ordinates the efforts of the network. Future meetings should be set up to explore and implement this proposal.

MEETING 2: TOWARDS DEVELOPING “CONSOLIDATED STANDARDS OF REPORTING TRIALS IN AYURVEDA”: 25 SEPTEMBER 2014

The Institute of Trans-Disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology University (TDU) (www.ihstuniversity.org) has been engaged in the development of standards for reporting Ayurveda clinical trials with an active collaboration between experts in traditional and allopathic medicine. The process was initiated in 2008, with discussions between researchers in Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine and members of CONSORT, consisting of experts in clinical trial methodology, guideline development, biomedical journal editors, and research funders (<http://www.consort-statement.org/about-consort>) at the 2nd Regional Symposium on Evidence-Informed Health Care held at the Christian Medical College, Vellore.

A perusal of the available scientific literature in Ayurveda revealed lack of consistent and complete reporting of clinical trials, indicating the urgent and crucial need for developing and propagating standards and guidelines for reporting.^[1] Most of the lacunae observed were in transparency of methodology, scientific rigor and ethics. This led to concerted efforts directed by TDU

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<p>Quick Response Code:</p> 	<p>Website: www.jaim.in</p>
	<p>DOI: 10.4103/0975-9476.154249</p>

to develop guidelines specific to Ayurveda based on the CONSORT format. There were several meetings of a core working group and Delphi exercises involving peers and experts in the field of Ayurveda and allied health specialties.^[2] These have culminated in a draft set of CONSORTIA, a reporting standard for clinical trials in Ayurveda.

Participants of the current meeting were provided the draft CONSORTIA document in advance. At the meeting, there was a presentation dwelling on the development process of the statement and description of the reporting elements of CONSORTIA and their rationale. The participants were requested to critically review the guidelines and give their views on its implementation. There was a lively discussion and excellent points were put across for improvement the guidelines. Developing a clear, operational definition of Ayurveda and inclusion of Ayurveda-specific inclusion criteria, assessment methods and end-points over and above the widely used Western biomedicine parameters were emphasized.

There have been numerous debates on the need for research in Ayurveda,^[3,4] the development of newer methodologies for clinical trials in Ayurveda^[5,6] and the rationale to emphasize the systemic approach of Ayurveda, rather than using current reductionist approaches for research in Ayurveda.^[5,6] However, it is imperative that whatever may be the case, there has to be a standard structure for reporting. The CONSORTIA is a step in this direction; it is hoped that both Ayurveda and allied health researchers find that adopting these guidelines improves the quality of research in Ayurveda and its reporting.

MEETING 3: CONSOLIDATION: 26 SEPTEMBER 2014

The third meeting consolidated the deliberations of the earlier meetings and a roadmap for initiating work in this direction was prepared. The initial steps proposed for the CAM satellite for Ayurveda included training and capacity building of Ayurveda researchers and setting up of a nodal Center for these activities. The CONSORTIA statement is to be circulated and published in all mainstream Ayurveda and CAM journals. Following feedback, further revisions can be planned.

Experts who attended the meetings

Dr. Eric Manheimer, CAM Field, University of Maryland, USA, Dr. GG Gangadharan, MS Ramaiah Indic Center for Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (MSR-ICAIM), Bangalore, India, Dr. MK Vivek Sanker, TDU, India, Dr. Sriranjini S Jaideep, TDU, India, Dr. Supriya Bhalerao, Interactive Research School for Health Affairs, Bharatiya

Vidyapeeth deemed University (IRSHA-BVDU), Pune, Dr. KS Dhiman, Gujarat Ayurveda University (GAU), India, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, GAU, India, Ms. Jini Hetherington, Cochrane Collaboration (Former Administrator), Dr. Kun Hyung Kim¹, Pusan National University, Dr. Sunil Kumar, National Institute of Ayurveda (NIA), Jaipur, Dr. Joseph Mathew, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India. Mr. Steve McDonald, Australasian Cochrane Centre, Monash University, Australia, Dr. SR Narahari, Institute of Applied Dermatology (IAD), Kasargode, India, Dr. Indika Pathiraja, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka, Dr. Puneet Gupta, Government Dental College Indore, Professor Arunasalam Pathmeswaran, Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Kelaniya University, Sri Lanka, Dr. Kishor Patwardhan, Benaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, Dr. BN Prakash, TDU, India, Dr. P Ram Manohar, Arya Vaidya Pharmacy Research Foundation (AVPRF), Coimbatore, Dr. Sridharan Ramarathnam, The Nerve Centre Chennai, India, Dr. Sanjeev Rastogi, State Ayurvedic College, Lucknow, India, Dr. Amita Ray, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, PES Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Dr. Mahadevan Seetharaman, TDU, India, Dr. G Shashidhara, TDU, India, Dr. Shreelatha S, TDU, India, Professor RH Singh, Faculty of Ayurveda BHU Varanasi, Professor Caroline Smith, National Institute of Complementary Medicine, University of Western Sydney, Australia, Mrs Vasumathi Sriganesh, Q-Med Knowledge Foundation, India, Ms. Caroline Struthers, Equator Network, Oxford, UK, Dr. Sudhamathi S, Department of Hospital Administration, Father Muller Homeopathic College, India, Dr. Gautham Suresh, Geisel School of Medicine, USA, Dr. Anup Thakar, Gujarat Ayurved University, India, Professor Prathap Tharyan, South Asian Cochrane Centre, Christian Medical College Vellore, India, Dr. Girish Tillu, JAIM, TDU, India, Dr. PM Unnikrishnan, United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), Dr. Lavanya Vijayaraghavan, TDU, India, Dr. Yuqing (Madison) Zhang, McMaster University, Canada.

Lavanya Vijayaraghavan, Jaideep Sitaram Sriranjini¹

*IAIM Health Care Center, School of Health Sciences, Institute of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology, ¹M S Ramaiah Indic Center for Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
E-mail: drsriranjini@gmail.com*

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How to cite this article: Vijayaraghavan L, Sriranjini JS. Meeting Report: Ayurveda group deliberations at 22nd Annual Cochrane Colloquium 2014. J Ayurveda Integr Med 2015;6:68-70.

Source of Support: The meetings were supported by the Institute of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU), Foundation of Revitalization for Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), Bangalore under the AYUSH-COE scheme. **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.